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AUTHOR Mann, Timothy J.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between correctional industry work experience and the work ethic of the inmate workers assigned to certain Florida correctional industry programs. Inmate workers (n=369) assigned to three of PRIDE Enterprises's correctional industry programs were participants. These industries were selected for the study: printing, vehicle refurbishing, and textiles. The Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) (Miller, 1997), the survey instrument, was a 65-item Likert scale questionnaire with responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Findings indicated that, compared with the Miller (1997) and Blumental (1999) studies, the only known studies of work ethic that used the MWEP, the inmates scored very high. The factor analysis showed five dimensions emerged: Morality/Ethics, Hard Work, Centrality of Work, Leisure, and Independence. Regression analysis showed no statistically significant relationship between the length of time a worker was assigned to an industry and his composite work ethic score. Neither did other independent variables affect the non-relationship between time in the industry and work ethic scores. Results did not support a common perception that the inmate population is unmotivated, amoral, self-centered, and lacking the discipline to withstand the rigors of regular employment. (Contains 13 references.) (YLB)

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Work Ethic of Prison Inmates Who Participate in Correctional Industries Programs

Symposium: The Meaning and Measurement of Work Ethic: Another Look

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Timothy J. Mann, Ph.D.
10119 Sea Spray Place
Tampa, FL 33624
(813) 963-0559
Email: tandhmann@aol.com

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Work Ethic of Prison Inmates Who Participate in Correctional Industries Programs

Timothy J. Mann

Introduction

In state and federal prisons across America, tens of thousands of inmates work in formal work programs called correctional industries. These industries are institution-based operations that produce products or services to customers that are external to the institution and whose inmate workers receive wages for their labor. Throughout the history of corrections, correctional industries have served multiple goals, including reducing the cost of incarceration, reducing inmate idleness, and training inmates in job skills. Indeed, the concept of work, and its perceived rehabilitative value, has been a principal component of correctional industries' operating philosophy from the beginning. By replicating their private sector counterparts, correctional industries offer inmates training in a realistic work setting, giving them the opportunity to learn the skills needed for reintegration into the private industrial world after their release.

As a group, inmates are under-achievers – in work experience, education, and the social graces. It is widely assumed, therefore, that inmates assigned to correctional industry programs would benefit from their experiences by learning useful occupational skills and a work ethic that will help them in the process of their rehabilitation.

Work plays a dominant role in the lives of most adults and it is central to the social order in America. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should also be the

focus of various ideologies, ethics and value systems. Conceptually, work ethic may be described as a cultural norm that places a positive moral value on doing a good job and is based on the belief that work has intrinsic value for its own sake (Cherrington, 1980; Yankelovich & Immerwahr, 1984). Operationally, work ethic comprises the skills, attitudes, and understandings that are essential to being successful in the world of work. A survey of state correctional industry program directors found that the majority of respondents felt that teaching the work ethic to inmates should be a primary objective and many of these directors have adopted this theme as a part of their operating mission (Henry, 1991). In addition, the American public, although favoring sending felons to prison, also endorses programs and interventions that hold the promise of returning offenders to society as better people.

Yet, there has been very little empirical research conducted on the effect of correctional industry participation on inmates' perception of work values and beliefs. Intuitively, the uniqueness of the correctional industry environment, which includes the influences of prison culture, the confluence of individuals thrust into an alien environment, and political and governmental influences, does affect the work attitudes and values of the inmate participants. While teaching inmates the work ethic is often touted as a primary objective of many correctional programs, there is no evidence of attempts to measure it or to establish some form of baseline for empirical investigation.

The principal purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between correctional industry work experience and the work ethic of the inmate workers

assigned to certain Florida correctional industry programs. A secondary purpose was to determine if the variables of age, race, education, time served in prison, primary offense, pre-prison employment status, length of time in the industry, industry location/type, and if serving a life sentence significantly affect that relationship. These independent variables were seen as potential modifiers of work ethic based on previous empirical studies of work ethic and the researcher's own experience in correctional industry programs.

The work ethic construct is an outgrowth of the Protestant Work Ethic philosophy of life described and analyzed by Max Weber, the German scholar, who related work to religious and economic activity. Because work plays such a dominant role in the lives of most adults and is central to the social order, researchers began to focus on various ideologies and value systems with which to define a meaningful framework, both cognitive and evaluative (Giorgi & Marsh, 1990). Weber's analysis of this philosophy, secularized over the years, became the foundation for "packaging" work ethic as a system of values or beliefs of people concerning the place of work in their lives that either serves as a conscious guide to conduct or is implied in manifested attitudes and behaviors (Siegel, 1983). The meaning or interpretation of work ethic appears to be fluid, changing with the times. Weber's hard line criteria of frugality, industry, and abstinence as characteristic of the Protestant work culture has softened through the years and is regarded more as an orientation toward the place of work in one's life rather than a religious calling. The secularization process, however, did not mean total abandonment of spiritually inspired relationships and values

of the past. People continue to seek more from their work than an adequate and secure income. They expect it to be a source of personal and social realization, a vocation and a source of value.

Research Methodology

The researcher, an employee of PRIDE Enterprises, conducted this study using inmate workers assigned to three of the company's correctional industry programs as participants. (PRIDE Enterprises, a not-for-profit corporation, was authorized by the Florida Legislature in 1981 to manage and operate the state's correctional industries.) The industries selected for this study (printing, vehicle refurbishing, and textiles) were chosen for their diversity, utility, and for being representative of the company's industries across the state. The correctional institutions (prisons) within which these industries are located are typical high-secure, male institutions with populations of up to 1,200 inmates. Because the statewide inmate population is overwhelmingly male and for other utilitarian reasons, this study dealt only with male participants. There were 385 inmates assigned to the three industries at the time of the study, of which 369 participated in the survey (N=369).

The Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) developed by Michael Miller (Miller, 1997) was the survey instrument used in this study. It is a 65-item paper and pencil questionnaire that solicits one of five responses on a Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The MWEP was chosen because it appeared to meet the following criteria: (a) it was multi-dimensional in scope, identifying factors such as hard work, self-reliance, importance of

work relative to leisure, and other dimensions long associated with the work ethic construct; (b) it was new, gender neutral, and written at an elementary level suitable for the inmate population under study; (c) it was considered manageable under the conditions characteristic of a prison industry setting; (d) it was psychometrically sound, although relatively untested; and (e) it was tested using two distinctly different populations.

The survey itself was constructed in a booklet format for convenience of administration and consisted of two sections: a demographic survey asking eight questions about the participants themselves and the 65-item MWEP employing a five-level Likert scale for item responses. The demographic survey permitted the researcher to develop a profile of the inmate-participants and to identify the principal characteristics that became the a priori independent variables used in the statistical analyses.

In conducting this project and performing the statistical analyses, the researcher used SAS computer software, employing both univariate descriptive statistics as well as multivariate inferential statistics. The latter involved the use of factor analysis and multiple regression statistical procedures. An alpha level of .05 was used throughout as the threshold for statistical significance. A summary of the statistical analyses follows.

For data collection, the researcher traveled to each of the three industries being studied and personally administered the MWEP survey to the inmate workers. In order to accommodate the needs of industry management and to minimize the disruption to production operations, the researcher conducted the

survey in small groups of about 5 to 10 workers. As part of the briefing to each group, the researcher read from a prepared statement advising them that their participation was voluntary and anonymous; that the information they provided would be used for research purposes only. In all, 369 inmate workers of the 385 assigned (97%) participated in the project and completed the MWEP questionnaire.

The median age of the workers who participated in the study was 38.7 with a range of 18 to 64 years. They were several years older than other PRIDE industry workers and nearly six years older than the median age of the overall state prison population. Significantly, blacks at 41%, make up a smaller percentage of the workforce than is reflected in the overall prison population where about 55% are black (Florida Department of Corrections, 1998). Nearly 50% of the inmate participants reported being high school graduates or having GEDs, compared with the tested 7.8 median grade level of level of all inmates in the Florida state correctional system. At the time of the study, the inmates working in these industries had already served an average of nearly 11 years, ranging from 1 to 36 years. Many were serving time for violent or sexual assault crimes, which is reflected in a high percentage of inmates serving life sentences or a series of long sentences. When asked about their pre-prison employment history, nearly 82% reported being employed for more than six months before coming into prison. Finally, the mean length of time assigned to the industry for all inmate workers participating in the survey was 37 months; however, this

varied considerably with workers' longevity ranging from a few weeks to more than 15 years.

Before conducting the study, a thorough review of the literature revealed only vague or intuitive references to inmate work ethic with no substantive research conducted to measure it. It has been widely assumed that inmates assigned to correctional industry programs benefit from their experiences by learning useful skills and a work ethic that will help them in their rehabilitative process. Yet, there is very little empirical evidence in the literature on the effect of participation in organized and structured work in a correctional industry setting on inmates' perception of work values and beliefs. Therefore, it has remained only an assumption that the correctional industry work experience helps inmates in their rehabilitative process.

For this study, the researcher posed three research questions:

(1) What are the dimensions and the levels of work ethic of inmates participating in correctional industries programs?

(2) What is the relationship between participation in the correctional industry program and inmate work ethic?

(3) What is the relationship between participation in a correctional industry program and the work ethic of inmate workers after controlling certain demographic and other variables unique to the prison environment?

Analyses and Findings

Research Question One

In addressing the first question, the researcher conducted a principal factors analysis using the Promax (oblique) rotation procedure. Through factor analysis using the MWEP-generated data, five factors were extracted that defined the dimensions of inmate worker work ethic. They were (in the order of variance explained):

1. Morality/Ethics (M=4.34, SD=.49) – How one values relationships with others; honesty and integrity; responsibility for one's own actions.

2. Hard Work (M=3.90, SD=.66) – The role that hard work plays in one's success and wellbeing; importance in overcoming obstacles.

3. Centrality of Work (M=3.82, SD=.60) – The intrinsic worth of work; its importance relative to investment of one's time; work as fulfillment.

4. Leisure (M=3.58, SD=.57) – Where leisure fits in an individual's life relative to work; the importance of having time to pursue leisure.

5. Independence (M=3.72, SD=.57) – The importance individuals give to "going it alone"; the feeling of control by not having to rely on others.

The composite score, M=3.88, SD=.39, as established in this study, the researcher suggests, may serve as an initial benchmark for future studies.

In comparing this study's results with those of Miller (1997), five of the dimensions replicated almost exactly Miller's dimensions: Self-Reliance, Morality/Ethics, Leisure, Hard Work, Centrality of Work. There were differences, however, in their order of variance explained. In this study, the Morality/Ethics

stood out as the factor with the highest set of correlations with the original variables whereas the Hard Work dimension was the most prominent in the Miller study. Conversely, the Independence dimension, which equates to Miller's Self-Reliance, played a much lesser role. (Note. The researcher chose the Independence label over Self Reliance because he perceived it to be a better descriptor.) The item distribution in this study, with only one exception, matched dimension for dimension with the Miller results. For this reason, the researcher chose to use the Miller labels except for the Independence dimension mentioned above. The clear difference between the two study results, however, was that Miller's Delay of Gratification and Wasted Time dimensions did not surface in this study.

The primary purpose of the first research question was to determine the level of inmate work ethic and the dimensions that make up work ethic as measured by the MWEP. Table 1 lists this study's results of mean scores and standard deviations for the study's five identified dimensions and the composite score.

Table 1
Inmate Work Ethic Scores

Dimension	Mean	SD
Morality/Ethics	4.34	0.49
Hard Work	3.90	0.66
Centrality of Work	3.82	0.60
Leisure	3.58	0.57
Independence	3.72	0.57
Composite	3.88	0.39

Note. N=369

Although the first research question dealt only with determining inmate work ethic and its principal dimensions, it seems appropriate at this juncture to make a broad comparison between the results of this study and those of the only other known (to the researcher) studies that have used the MWEP to give some perspective to assigning discreet numbers to the work ethic construct. Compared with the other studies that used the MWEP instrument, the inmate workers in this project scored higher on all of the dimensions. By replicating Miller's (1997) seven dimensions, used also by Blumental (1999) in her study of Generation Xers, the inmate worker scores in this study should provide an interesting, if not useful, perspective on how incarcerated inmates value these work ethic dimensions. To affect a comparison, the researcher applied the inmate data to Miller's seven dimensions and the items within those dimensions. (Note: The researcher made no attempt to rationalize differences between his exploratory factor analysis results and those of the Miller study. This comparison should stand alone.) The results of this comparison show that the correctional industry workers scored somewhat higher than Blumental's combined over/under-35 groups and considerably higher than both of the Miller groups. Table 2 gives a summary of these scores (expressed as the sum of dimensional item means.)

Table 2

Inmate Work Ethic – Comparison with Other Groups

Dimension	Miller (1997) Students	Miller (1997) AF Enlisted	Blumental Ali (1999)	Mann (1999) Inmates
Morality/Ethics	16.08	13.90	40.43	43.21
Hard Work	22.09	16.84	38.12	39.59
Centrality of Work	24.34	20.79	36.77	38.86
Leisure	28.63	31.50	30.12	35.78
Self-Reliance	26.11	24.84	36.08	37.22
Delay of Gratification	16.95	14.08	24.18	25.58
Wasted Time	19.96	16.10	29.18	31.25
Composite	154.16 N=598	138.02 N=268	234.88 N=524	251.49 N=369

Research Question Two

From the outset, the researcher sought to explore the relationship between industry work experience (measured as time in the industry) and the inmates' work ethic. The purpose of this was to address the hypothesis that correctional industry work experience has a positive effect on an inmate's attitudes, beliefs, and values about work. Using regression analysis, the researcher found no statistically significant relationship between the length of time a worker is assigned to an industry and his composite work ethic score. In addition, of the five dimensions, only Hard Work was significant at $p=.01$. However, this proved to be inconsequential and of no practical significance because of its very low R^2 (proportion of variance explained) of 0.02.

Research Question Three

The third research question asked whether or not the relationship of length of time in the industry to inmate work ethic was somehow affected or changed

by other independent variables, such as education, time served, etc., when controlling for them statistically. It was assumed that most, if not all, of these variables would have some degree of correlation and, therefore, any one of them could influence the time-in-industry/work ethic relationship. To examine this potential, the researcher conducted a series of regression analyses for each of the other independent variables. The result was that there was no change in the non-significant relationship between time in the industry and the composite work ethic score.

Similarly, the researcher conducted regression analyses on each of the five work ethic dimensions to determine if any of the independent variables would affect or change the non-significant relationship between time in the industry and work ethic. As with the work ethic composite score analyses, the time variable continued to remain statistically non-significant.

In summary, the findings of research and the summary of observations must be considered within the context of their limitations both in scope and in application. First, this study was limited to sampling male workers in only three of PRIDE's fifty or more industries. Female inmates, working in a similar kind of environment might view work quite differently than their male counterparts. Consequently, the results of this study may not be generalizable beyond the restrictive boundaries cited above. Second, the demographic profile fits an older, black inmate, convicted of major crimes, and one who has already served many years in confinement. The younger inmate, serving a relatively short term and soon to be released, may possess different work values and attitudes than

his older counterpart. Finally, the prison as an institution has its own culture. To make comparisons with other groups outside the prison in the free community may be unrealistic and misleading.

Conclusions

Inmates Have Their Own Work Ethic

Compared with the Miller (1997) and Blumental (1999) studies, the only known studies of work ethic that used the MWEP, the inmates in this project scored very high. The factor analysis showed five well-grouped dimensions that compared favorably with five of the seven dimensions that Miller (and later replicated by Blumental) developed in his study using students and Air Force enlisted personnel as the participants. The other two dimensions, Delay of Gratification and Wasted Time, did not stand out in this study as important issues. The dimensions that did emerge were Morality/Ethics, Hard Work, Centrality of Work, Leisure, and Independence. On the surface, there appears to be some inconsistency; for example, one might assume that inmates would score lower than their "civilian" counterparts on the Morality/Ethics dimension, given their propensity to break laws and violate their neighbor's rights. Nevertheless, this dimension emerged as being dominant. What is happening here, in the view of the researcher, is both understandable and realistic when one considers the unique environment within which prison inmates exist.

Much has been written about prison sub-cultures and prisons as communities. The inmate population endures to a more or less degree the five "pains of imprisonment" that include the loss of social acceptance, material

possessions, personal security, heterosexual relations and personal autonomy (Sykes, in Goodstein & Wright, 1989). From an inmate's perspective, the prison is a community of "us" (the inmates) against "them" (institutional authority) with its own culture, rules, and mores (James, Witte, & Tal-Mason, 1996). So long as correctional authorities remain primarily committed to assuring efficient custodial control over the lives of those committed to them, they unintentionally encourage the emergence of an oppositional inmate subculture (Thomas & Petersen, 1977). Within this subculture, inmates develop a normative of moral, ethical, and social values not unlike their free brothers and sisters, except that it develops out of the need for survival. The lack of privacy, space, and freedom, combined with an authoritarian institutional structure, force individuals to respect the rights of others if they expect to maintain any sort of social order and equilibrium. The high Morality/Ethics dimension, therefore, is grounded in pragmatism and speaks to a need arising from the demands of an institutional culture.

Regarding the place of work within the prison culture, it seems evident that when one considers the alternative to work – complete idleness – most inmates would consider work as having a dominant role their daily regimen. The inmate workers in this study were all volunteers, i.e., they did not have to apply for the job and go to work in the industry. They were motivated to go to work if only as a way to avoid being idle. Then, by their working in a structured, organized environment that emulates a private sector business, they are provided the opportunities for self-expression and are rewarded for their services. These

benefits are non-existent on the prison compound. Idleness in prison is not equivalent to leisure. There are no after-work pastimes to pursue and no family or other social responsibilities to occupy inmates' time. The alternative to working in a correctional industry for most is abject idleness. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that inmate workers would place significant importance and value to the Hard Work and Centrality of Work dimensions of the work ethic construct.

Finally, participating in a formal work program, such as one of the three PRIDE industries, may provide the "niche" for many inmates to "satisfy at least some of his or her needs and to function in a microenvironment that is compatible with his or her interests" (Goodstein & Wright, 1989, p. 245). It seems appropriate to conclude that inmates who score high on the work ethic scale may be seeking to live as individuals (Independence), trying to find a routine that meets their basic needs and provides, as much as possible, in an otherwise alien environment.

There is No Relationship Between Time On the Job and Inmate Work Ethic

From the very beginning, one of the acknowledged benefits of correctional industries has been to teach inmates how to work and to instill in them the work ethic. As the result, they are better equipped to resume their place in the free community when they completed their prison terms. One of the purposes of this research study was to test this premise by first measuring and scoring inmate work ethic using an appropriate instrument and then trying to determine if an inmate's time in the industry changed or enhanced the work ethic scores.

Results of this study showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the lengths of time inmates spend in the industry and their level of work ethic. Intuitively, one would expect that individuals coming into the industry with little or no work experience would exhibit some change in their work values and attitudes. However, the results of this study do not support that notion. This suggests, perhaps, that their apparent constancy of response regardless of time on the job is related to some other, more influential medium, such as their institutional environment.

Other Variables Do Not Affect the Non-relationship Between Time in the Industry and Work Ethic Scores

The importance given by the researcher to the question of length of time in the industry and its relationship to work ethic gave rise to the third question. Would other independent variables considered as potentially important modifiers affect the status of that relationship? Previous work ethic research in other groups and populations suggested that certain demographic variables, such as education, age, and race, affected work ethic scores (e.g., Cherrington, Condie, & England, 1979; Petty, 1995; Petty & Hill, 1994; Rowe & Snizek, 1995). To address the question, the researcher selected eight independent variables relating to demographics and other factors unique to a prison environment that could correlate with the length of time variable and influence its relationship with the participants' work ethic scores. When controlling for each of these variables, such as age, race, education, time served, etc., no

statistically significant change occurred. This supported the non-significant relationship between time in the industry and inmates' work ethic.

Notwithstanding the above conclusions, a cautionary note seems appropriate. This study represents several "firsts"; including being the first time for examining correctional industry inmates' attitudes and values toward work; and the first time for the MWEP to be used with this population. In addition, the high work ethic scores and non-relationship of time in the industry to work ethic may be influenced by several phenomena not addressed in this research. For example:

1. Inmates assigned to PRIDE's correctional industry programs are volunteers and, therefore, may be a "cut above" other inmates who choose not to work. In addition, a high motivation to keep their jobs (because the only alternative is idleness) may have influenced the manner in which they completed the MWEP questionnaire.

2. The high work ethic scores exhibited by the inmate workers may have been influenced by the special attention given to them during the testing process and their awareness of participating in a research project.

3. Other factors, such as their age and diverse backgrounds, could have affected the workers' response patterns, resulting in higher scores.

Implications

The results of this research do not support a common perception that the inmate population is unmotivated, amoral, self-centered and lacking the discipline to withstand the rigors of regular employment. The inmate workers

who participated in this study exhibited a high regard for the benefits of hard work and held work as central to their daily regimen. This suggests that inmates have the aptitude and the orientation for productive work, at least in terms of the three correctional industries studied. This has implications for correctional industry and correctional education trainers in designing on-the-job training and vocational education programs. Correctional industries are increasingly being required to show performance results in terms of increasing self-sufficiency, reducing costs to the taxpayer, maximizing inmate employment while incarcerated, and maximizing inmate employment upon release. Establishing formal training programs that reinforce work values and attributes may enhance inmate workers' prospects for carrying learned skills with them after their release.

The results of this study lead to the conclusion that there is apparently no relationship between the lengths of time inmate workers spend in the industry and their work ethic scores. In addition, other extraneous variables apparently do not materially affect that relationship one way or the other. This runs counter to intuitive and anecdotal experience that correctional industries teach work ethic to the extent that inmates leaving their industry jobs are better prepared to secure good jobs and keep them once they return to their home communities upon release.

The implication, as mentioned earlier, is that some other influence is at play. This suggests additional research is needed to try to determine why inmate work ethic does not improve or otherwise change with time on the job. The

answer to this question may provide insight to correctional industry managers and correctional educators in the design and development of training and education programs.

Finally, this study raised more questions than answers, thereby inviting further inquiry. The issues are important. With the national prison population now at two million people, most of whom will eventually return to their home communities, it is of paramount importance to continue research into work and education programs within the prison environment. The experience of this study, and the information learned from it, should prompt continued research into inmate work ethic. In particular, this study's results suggest that the prison environment, and the culture it supports, may have some confounding effect on inmates' perception of work. Additional research exploring the possible interrelationship between prison environment and inmate work ethic could yield useful information for application in training and education program development. The potential benefit to the inmate and ultimately to society at large, in the view of this researcher, is significant.

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